

Colonial Citizen as an Educational Ideal

Krishna Kumar

The customary statement that colonial education was 'aimed' at producing clerks is both theoretically feeble and historically untenable. We need a more adequate model capable of accommodating the contradictions that were inherent in the vision of colonial education as well as those that became manifest in its consequences. This paper attempts to use the concept of an educational ideal to identify an organising principle in Indian colonial education in the nineteenth century

WE owe the concept of an educational ideal as a means of historical inquiry to Mannheim. He defined it as "a residue of attitudes, principles and forms of behaviour" which shape educational aims and arrangements in a period of history.¹ The concept enabled him to debunk the notion—which still prevails—that education has certain universal and eternal aims. He was able to demonstrate that educational aims have a historical character, that they change as much as the guiding ideals of other cultural activities change over time. The concept of an educational ideal also served Mannheim as a method of analysis. He used it both for historical investigations and for participating in the discussion of educational aims in his own day.

In this paper, I intend to use the concept as a means to identify an organising principle in Indian colonial education during the nineteenth century. The customary statement that colonial education was 'aimed' at producing clerks is both theoretically feeble and historically untenable. Its theoretical weakness lies in the fact that it does not help us distinguish between the ideas underlying an educational system and its practical purposes.

But even if one saw it as a statement about the immediate outcomes of colonial education, one finds little evidence to support it. Colonial education produced political leaders, professional men, and intellectuals, not just office clerks. No simple model or statement will help us understand why colonial education had the kinds of effects it had. It socialised many into colonial values; at the same time, it turned many of its products against those values. The rejection of colonial education may not have been sustained for long periods, but the broader rejection of colonial rule was sustained and we cannot ignore the role of education in inspiring this rejection. A plain, instrumentalist view of colonial education—as a factory producing clerks—does stop us from seeing this aspect of Indian history since the nineteenth century. It also stops us from appreciating the contradictions in which the freedom struggle was caught. One contradiction on which I will focus towards the end related to the perception of the uneducated population as an object of moral improvement. On this matter, there existed a strange homonym between colonial and anti-colonial discourses on education, to make sense of this homonym against the broader context of the role of education in the nationalist struggle, we need a more adequate

model than exists at present. Such a model should have the capacity to accommodate the contradictions that were inherent in the vision of colonial education as well as those that became manifest in its consequences.

ADULT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

At the heart of the colonial enterprise was an adult-child relationship. The coloniser took the role of the adult, and the native became the child. The adult-child relationship entailed an educational task. The colonial master saw it as his responsibility to initiate the native into new ways of acting and thinking. Like the little elephant Babar in the children's series of that name, some of the natives had to be educated so that they would be civilised according to the master's idea.² This may be a simplistic summary, but it does capture the core agenda of colonial rule and education. The agenda was to train the native to become a citizen. Writing in *The Citizen of India* (a school textbook that lasted for many years) in 1897, Lee-Warner described the British Empire as an educational experience for India. It did not matter that the system of education had remained rather limited, he argued, for it was wrong to judge the education of India merely by the development of the education system. The railways, the public works, the posts and telegraphs were all educational agencies of the empire. They all showed the benevolence, the industriousness, and the dedication of English administrators, he said.³

For the English officers of early nineteenth century in India, the concept of 'citizen' symbolised a new way of life and a new social order. It encapsulated the visions and tasks that post-reformation social thought, science, and literature had placed before the emerging urban bourgeoisie of England. The colonial administration in India had shown little interest in education before 1813 when the Charter of the East India Company was renewed and a modest provision was made for expenditure on institutions of learning. However, the interest in education which was now expressed was conceptually consistent with the steps that had been taken earlier in matters of general administration. Creation of landed property rights was one such step. It was implemented somewhat differently in the three presidencies, but the ideological assumptions behind it were the same in all three cases. These assumptions were part of the social philosophy of liberalism.⁴ The state's role,

in this philosophy, was to assist the civil society to fulfil its goal of ensuring individual rights, particularly the right to hold and increase property. Ownership of property was a key concept in liberal thought.⁵ It constituted the ground on which the emerging commercial class of English society had fought its battle against the powers of the church and monarchy. Several of the late eighteenth century colonial administrators in India, who put in enormous efforts to establish the concept of private property, were inspired by early liberal political thought. They were also working under the imperative of creating a dependable fiscal base for the colonial state. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the empire had been more or less won. The job now was to keep it, and to use it for profit. The colonial adventure was in a sense over, ready to be exploited by writers of boys' novels over the next one hundred years. Construction of an imperial power structure was the task at hand. The East India Company's monopoly over trade with India had come under pressure from a variety of business houses. With the advancement of industrial production, commercial interests in England had begun to feel tempted towards the far larger markets of Asia than the market England could ever provide. The East India Company was accused of monopolising the Indian market, and keeping it underdeveloped with its impractical policies. Among the critics was Adam Smith who had criticised, as early as 1776, the Company's monopoly of trade with India. He had found a serious contradiction between the Company's role as an administrative body and as a trading concern. With the Company's successes in subduing India's native sovereignties and thereby in clearing away the insecurities that lay in trade with India, the demand for the end of the Company's monopoly become increasingly stronger.⁶

EDUCATION AND EMPIRE-BUILDING

The appropriate role for the Company was now believed to be that of a custodian of English trading interests. It was now required to create congenial conditions in which the 'free trade' ideology of an ambitious English bourgeoisie could safely flourish. A commercial institution thus was made to become a colonial state, and to change its rhetoric from profit for itself into service of the empire. Involving the dominant groups of Indian society in the functioning of the colonial state was part of the

Company's new job. It implied the creation of a new order in the colony, a civil society among the natives. The ethos, the *redes*, and the symbols of the new order had to be constructed, in a manner that would not disturb the ongoing commercial enterprise. The violence which had helped build the empire could now onwards be practised only on the outskirts of the proposed civil society. Within it, coercion had to be replaced by socialisation. This is where education had a role to play.

The educational aspect of this role has not received much analytical attention. It is easy to place education within the broad context of empire-building, but that does not help us identify the ideological roots of colonial education. We cannot make sense of the Company's educational programmes if we only look upon them as variations on utilitarian doctrine, or, alternatively, as steps to strengthen imperialist domination. These models may help us narrate what happened in the nineteenth century in India, but they do not impart us any better understanding of the residues that the nineteenth century left for India to live with. This perhaps is not the historian's job, but it is certainly an important task of educational theory. The residues are related to the idea of creating a civil society in India. It was a complex idea, constituting elements of several different kinds—liberal economic and political doctrine, paternalism, and evangelicism. But what gave it the edge of plausibility was the self-delusory confidence so typical of colonisers. Until late nineteenth century, colonial officers worked in India with that supreme self-reassurance which demands superficial acquaintance with the colony's society and geography. Colonisation was a project undertaken with inadequate data, which is why it was an adventure as many children's novels of the nineteenth century depicted it.⁷ It was precisely the aspect of adventure in the colonial enterprise that gave the coloniser such craving for security mixed with a sense of prowess, his grand visions and his awe of expense, his paternalism and his readiness for military action.

CREATING A CIVIL SOCIETY

In order to appreciate the role of education in creating a civil society, and to analyse the assumptions behind the role, let us look at an early formulation of the problem. The following note was written by Lord Minto (Gilbert Elliot), governor-general from 1807 to 1812. The specific purpose of this note was to justify the setting up of two new Hindu Colleges and the reform of the existing one at Banaras. It is the wider rationale for the spread of education under British initiative that interests us. Minto wrote this note in 1811:

The ignorance of the natives in the different classes of society, arising from the want of proper education, is generally acknowledged. This defect not only excludes them as individuals from the enjoyment of all those comforts and benefits which the cultivation

of letters is naturally calculated to afford, but operating as it does throughout almost the whole mass of the population, tends materially to obstruct the measures adopted for their better government. Little doubt can be entertained that the prevalence of the crimes of perjury and forgery, so frequently noticed in the official reports, is in a great measure ascribable, both in the Mahomedans and Hindoos, to the want of due instruction in the moral and religious tenets of their respective faiths. It has been even suggested, and apparently not without foundation, that to this uncultivated state of the minds of the natives is to be ascribed the prevalence of those crimes which were recently so great a scourge to the country. The later offences against the peace and happiness of society have indeed for the present been materially checked by the vigilance and energy of the police, but it is probably only by the more general diffusion of knowledge among the great body of the people that the seeds of these evils can be effectively destroyed.⁸

Minto is talking about the moral role of education in the context of civil administration. 'Happiness' to him is that state of comfort which derives from being governed nicely. Lack of good government obstructs the opportunities of pleasure—even in the case of those who could individually obtain pleasure through means such as literary reading. Their chances of enjoyment are clouded by the prevalence of insecurity. For others too, the government cannot offer sustained comfort as its own capacities are used up for dealing with criminal tendencies. Efficiency of the police helps, but the spread of education would be better. It would make the maintenance of law and order easier. This was the gist of Minto's thought according to Butler who concluded his speech at the Imperial Legislative Assembly in 1911 after the discussion of Gokhale's Elementary Education Bill by saying: "exactly a century ago, in the year 1811, Lord Minto, who looks down upon us in this Council from that wall, penned his famous Minute in which he said—for the first time in the course of British rule, it was then said that the ignorance of the people was subversive to good government and conducive to crime."⁹

IDEOLOGY OF RISING COMMERCIAL CLASS

The validity of Minto's line of argument rests on eighteenth century concepts of 'happiness', 'cultivation', and 'ignorance'. Happiness was perceived, as the result of pleasure-causing sensations. If circumstances favoured the formation of series of such sensations, the amount of happiness produced by the sensations would be greater. This view of happiness, which was derived from associational psychology and was nourished by Newtonian mechanism, found a political context in the concept of the civil society under which the sensations causing happiness were deemed to proliferate. Security of one's property was a key circumstance of this kind, which the utilitarians were going to use later on as the cor-

nerstone of their model of protective democracy. Security would allow not only the enjoyment of available means of happy sensations; it would also give man's mind the freedom to enhance the sources of such sensations. Indeed, freedom (of the propertied man to apply his knowledge and skills to increase his material comforts) became an aspect of happiness, and the insurance of both was expected to be provided by the state. In the civil society that the English middle class regarded as its ideal and which Minto's predecessors had inaugurated in India, rational behaviour meant translating one's concern for the safety of property into the desire to strengthen the state's efforts to establish order. This kind of civil rationality alone was supposed to ensure the ultimate advantages of leisure for cultivating one's sensibility. Lack of such rationality meant ignorance.

This was the philosophy of a rapidly rising and ambitious urban commercial class. Its determination to wed practical sense with personal morality had found ample literary expression throughout the eighteenth century, from Addison at the beginning to Jane Austen towards the end. The vision had already been scattered widely, not as a utopia of the elite but as a viable dream for all. The dream provided the motive force for popular education movements in nineteenth century England. These movements gradually pushed the state to assume responsibility for the education of the poorest. This did not happen in India. Here, the dream of the English bourgeoisie merely provided the vocabulary with which a minuscule civil society could legitimise its rise in the midst of exploitation of the working population. The dynamics of colonial administration gave a very long life in India to the eighteenth century English diction in which 'people' and 'citizen' meant only the men of status or property.

Others were divested of individuality. The labouring classes were perceived as the 'masses' among whom it was considered unnecessary to recognise individuals. They were used as cheap, often forced, labour by the bourgeois coloniser with the same indifference with which they had been used earlier and continued to be used now by the feudal or quasi-feudal powers within the Indian society. The use of the colonial government's funds for the diffusion of elementary education among the masses was questioned within the bureaucracy on grounds of good business sense. Warden's argument,¹⁰ that "education, as a Government concern, will be expensive without being beneficial", and that it could be made beneficial by "judicious encouragement" of the better off sections of Indian society was shared by many English officers. Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay, put it bluntly:

I cannot look for reduction of expense in the different branches of our Government from any diminution of the salaries now enjoyed by European public servants, but I do look to it from many of the duties they now have

to perform being executed by natives on diminished salaries."

Along this line of thought, state spending on education could be explained mainly as investment in the preparation of cheaper, trustworthy subordinates. The Charter Act of 1833 opened the civil services to Indians. From here on every student was assumed to be aspiring for civil service, and the Indian civil servant was perceived as the heart of the small civil society.

FOR A MINORITY

The thought that the civil society in India could only be a minuscule minority disturbed neither the idea nor the vocabulary we have examined. The perception of the usefulness of education as an aid to social order and peace, by virtue of being a morally uplifting influence, remained remarkably aloof from demographic and social reality. Trevelyan, writing in 1838, went as far as predicting that the educated classes, "a small minority" now will "in time become the majority".¹² For the colonial officers of the first half of the nineteenth century, the empire had not yet been 'translated' into palpable demographic and geographical reality. This was to occur in the latter part of the century, particularly after 1857. The sense of reality that comes from geographical surveys and census was a late development. It occurred too late to influence the vocabulary in which the colonial vision of education had found expression. By then it had become clear that the 'civil society' could only be a small network of men of property ('respectable natives'), civil servants, and professionals (mainly in law and medicine). The fact that education and its effects could not possibly go beyond this small part of the population did little to alter the vocabulary of educational discourse which continued to echo the eighteenth century English equation between good governance and improvement of public morality.

The persistence of this vocabulary does call for an explanation, and we can find one in the manner in which colonial conditions distorted eighteenth century educational ideas. We have seen that the concept of 'order' was central to colonial policy in all areas of administration, including education. This concept was rooted in the liberal belief that the state's role is mainly to maintain congenial conditions for the enhancement of pleasure (of the man who had the means to enjoy himself). Emanating from this belief, 'order' stood for the state's contribution to the bourgeois's pleasure. The state was supposed to make this contribution by providing for a dual arrangement for education. The dual arrangement would consist, on the one hand, of a scheme of moral improvement of the masses, and, on the other hand, a different sort of provision for the intellectual and aesthetic enrichment of the propertied class. The moral education of the children of ordinary people would emphasise religious and quasi-religious literary learning aimed at imparting virtues such as obedience, modesty, rule-governed beha-

viour, and acceptance of one's station in society. On the other hand, the education of the upper class children would provide for the learning of classical languages and literature, and the skills related to reflection and inquiry.¹³

This framework of a dual role for education became somewhat distorted under colonial conditions. Here, the moral improvement of the masses could not be pursued in any substantial sense due to the weight of financial rhetoric. The colonial state was after all no welfare agency. It existed to facilitate and expand exploitative trade. Funding a programme of mass education was beyond its purview even if some charitable soul like Munro passionately supported it. On the other hand, the colonial state needed people within the colonised society whom it could depend on. It was important that these trustworthy people should be influential in the native community. The colonial state apparatus was much too small to ensure order without the collaboration of such influential people. Although this collaborating class had men of property within it, the liberal notion of a mainly intellectual and aesthetic education could not apply to their children. They too, after all, were part of the colony, and hence needed moral upliftment in order to become trustworthy. So 'mass education' became a programme which owing to its financially restrained expansion, could only reach the upper classes, but it remained essentially a moral programme as was appropriate for a colony. Literature, political philosophy, history, and later on even science were to be treated in it as morally beneficial influences.

UTILITARIANISM AND EVANGELICISM

The 1844 report excerpted below reflects the vision of an educated India in terms of two currents of contemporary English thought—utilitarianism and evangelicism. The first represents a crystallisation of the line of thought that Minto was following. It gets an added sharpness from the faith in scientific reasoning which the industrial revolution had helped to deepen. The second current was not an altogether new development either, but it had by now virtually reversed the earlier English perception of India. Whereas many eighteenth century liberals in England perceived India as a developed civilisation, Victorian liberal opinion found India a sort of sad sleeping beauty that needed charity and the touch of a new life. The Bombay report of 1844 says:

The object of Government we take to be perfectly distinct and intelligible, namely, to make as vigorous an impression upon the Asiatic mind as possible, to rouse it from the torpor into which it has subsided for some hundred years past, and to place it in a condition for receiving and digesting the results of European progress and civilisation... Ignorance in all ages has been the fruitful mother of vice, in a great degree by the undue development given to the passions in minds where intellectual enjoyment can find no entry, but mainly by the temptation and

facility which it affords to the crafty and designing, of preying upon the ignorant masses. One of the main duties of Government in modern times is to protect one class of its subjects, the weak, the unwary; the helpless, in one word the large majority, from the unprincipled few, and the remedy, acknowledged to be the most available one, is to inspire the bulk of the population with the desire, and to afford them the means, of acquiring as much exact knowledge as possible on the various subjects and ideas...¹⁴

The problem of immoral behaviour is squarely equated with that of ignorance. This understanding gave to many nineteenth century rationalists a strong hope of seeing the Utopia of an enlightened humanity built within foreseeable future. The state's role in this vision was that of a protector of the 'ignorant masses' who personified the 'Asiatic mind' portrayed by James Mill in his popular history of India. Enemies of the state's paternalistic role were considered to be few in number, personified in practitioners of obscurantist forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge and the hold of these forms on 'ignorant' people were both characteristics of the Asiatic mind as Victorian intellectuals and administrators had come to understand it. The means by which the state could subdue its enemies, in this perception, was education of the masses in 'exact' forms of knowledge. These 'exact' forms represented the west's scientific tradition. If the masses could be prepared to accept it as the guiding light of conduct, the state's role in transforming the Asiatic mind would be largely fulfilled. Education, thus, was perceived as the chief agency for accomplishing the great moral agenda of colonialism. Irrespective of the success of the colonial government in educating the masses, the rhetoric of education would provide the legitimation that the colonial enterprise always needed, especially in the moral climate of the Victorian age in England.

STEREOTYPES OF ASIATIC MINDS

The rationale for public education took an epistemological form, but it was ethical at its core. No doubt, knowledge by itself was seen as a moral influence in post-reformation thought, but prevailing stereotypes of the Asiatic mind and the further accentuation of the stereotypes by evangelical enterprise made this association far stronger.

The core stereotype was that Indians were highly emotional, and were incapable of controlling themselves with the aid of rationality. The perception was based on the eighteenth century differentiation between 'passions' and 'reason'. As numerous examples from eighteenth century English literature show, no success in life could be imagined unless a person controlled 'passions' with the help of 'reason'. The idea was that the guiding light of rationality, emanating from puritanic Christianity and scientific reasoning (no conflict had yet developed between the two) was essential to purge the passions which would otherwise lead to certain ruin, both material and

spiritual. And this light was precisely what Indians lacked from the English point of view. The great fear of the English bourgeois, that he would ruin his fortunes by giving in to 'passions', and his sense of conquest over the fear in his own life, were both transposed on the Indian society. This is where the metaphorical darkness of India and the Indian mind, representing its 'ignorance', acquired its emotive force. For the early nineteenth century planner of education in India, the path was clear: to pierce India's ignorance with the light of western science to enable Indians to lead a life of reason, with their passions under control.

Knowledge was what the new education was supposed to give, but its inner agenda was to improve conduct. Opportunity to receive knowledge at an English school became an excuse to become disciplined, to have one's morality improved. Education in the sense of learning became less important than the moral influence it was supposed to exercise.¹⁵ And 'moral influence' was a euphemism for Christian ethics. A programme for mass education was a well-guarded excuse, in Trevelyan's reasoning, for bringing India securely under England's domination. As he acknowledged privately to Bentick in one of his letters, the role of education in imparting western knowledge was only the practical part of the scheme of education, and that alone needed to be revealed; the latent part was to influence India morally, and to treat her as a footstool for extending the moral light of the west throughout Asia.¹⁶ Elphinstone too secretly rejoiced at the fact that natives are not aware of the connection (i.e., between education and their eventual acceptance of Christianity).¹⁷

SELF-PERCEPTION OF EDUCATED INDIAN

Education did not help Christianity the way Trevelyan and Elphinstone, among many others, had hoped, but it did influence the self-perception of the educated Indian. In some individuals, education caused a turmoil, an identity crisis but in a greater number of cases that we can study with the help of biographies, education led to a new, positive self-image. The educated men's loyalty to the empire was distinct from that of the semi-literate soldier precisely because it had the added component of faith in oneself as a product of English education. The faith made the completion of one's educational career look like a second birth. Success in the matriculate or the BA examination marked this event, as many nineteenth century biographies show.¹⁸ So did a journey to England for higher education. Like success after the rigours of an examination, arrival in England gave one a new identity. W C Bonnerjee, who became the first president of the Indian National Congress, conveyed this sense of having acquired a new identity when he wrote from England to his uncle in 1865; "I have discarded all ideas of caste, I have come to hate all the demoralis-

ing practices of our countrymen and I write this letter an entirely altered man."¹⁹

The little civil society that education helped to form consisted of the higher castes, particularly the Brahmins, of the major towns of British controlled India. Facilities for English education were quickly exploited by the better-off families of Brahmin and other higher castes to equip their children with the new skills, knowledge, and certificates required for employment in colonial administration. This was nothing new in the history of Brahmins and other castes of high status. Their capacity to renovate their repertoire of skills for maintaining status and power had manifested many times earlier. Nehru gives us a brief view of this process in his autobiography in the context of Kashmiri Brahmins. They had a 'remarkable capacity for adaptation', he says, which was displayed in their inter-action with the Indo-Persian culture of the plains. 'Later they adapted themselves with equal rapidity to the changing order, when a knowledge of English and the elements of European culture became necessary.'²⁰ The Brahmins of Bengal, Maharashtra, and Madras were among the first Indians to master the new language and to imbibe the modes of behaviour necessary for dealing with the English officers. Although they proved culturally so nimble and prudent, they did not spare from criticism others who adopted western ways. These 'others' included men of non-Brahmin higher castes, converts to Christianity, and women. By criticising others' westernisation, the Brahmins struggled desperately to maintain the authenticity of their status in a situation in which the right to assign status was no more theirs. English education had triggered a competition among all caste groups, including the lower castes. What made this competition unique in the history of caste was its speed.

UNDERMINING TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the function of education in undermining traditional structures of dominance had become well-established. It is true that developments in certain regions expressed this tendency far more sharply than in other regions. On the whole, the role of education in disturbing traditional social hierarchies was more clearly expressed in the south than in the north. In Kerala, the struggle of downtrodden groups like the Izhavas owed considerably to their educational attainments under the Christian missionaries. Pullapilly makes the point that the Izhavas' fight for civil rights and justice "presupposed a certain amount of social consciousness and educational preparation".²¹ The same thing could be said of several non-Brahmin peasant castes and some of the untouchable castes of the areas under present-day Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In Maharashtra, the work of Satyashodhak Samaj established by Phule led to the demand for educational facilities among oppressed caste groups. In

his submission to the Hunter Commission, Phule wrote: "upon what grounds is it asserted that the best way to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people is to raise the standard of instruction of the higher classes?"²²

It is correct to say that the recognition of education as an agency of material and social benefits triggered a competition in the caste hierarchy. Yet, the higher castes maintained a strong hold on educational facilities, especially on the facilities for higher education. The small civil society of the educated remained in all parts of British India largely confined to the higher castes. There was a trickle from below, but it was too small to alter the character of the civil society. This is why it is worth asking which of the two roles of education was more influential in shaping the cultural and political life of India at the turn of the century—the role of strengthening group-solidarity among the educated, or the role of disturbing traditional hierarchies? The first is rarely acknowledged, whereas the second has been highly overestimated. In his Elementary Education Bill speech in 1911, Gokhale had mentioned that only 1.9 per cent of India's total population was attending elementary schools. One can hardly overemphasise the group-forming force of an experience as narrowly spread as education was in colonial India. No doubt, education did bring about a certain degree of upward mobility among lower caste groups in small pockets of British India. This role of education was hardly as pervasive as sociologists have persuaded us to think. Indeed, what role education did play in this direction was absorbed in its more vital group-forming role among the educated.

NEW CULTURAL PROPERTY

Whether it was the case of the higher castes using education to renovate their repertoire of skills, or the alternative case in some areas of middle and lower castes using education to move up, we notice that the major social function of education was to differentiate its beneficiaries from the larger population. It did so by serving as a new cultural property. Certificates, mark-sheets, and medals were the manifest possessions that this property brought, and people cherished and displayed them avidly. Names of students who had passed matriculate and higher examinations appeared division-wise in newspapers. Locating one's own name or of someone from the village became a dramatic social event as several memoirs indicate. But more important were the possessions that education gave in terms of new capacities, particularly the capacity to read and write English and to quote from English literature. The fact that someone could read a letter written in English or compose an application distinguished him from other ordinary people. It gave the educated man a rare distinction, considering how small the proportion of the Indian population came into the orbit of education.

Command over the coloniser's language, eligibility for state employment and status were the components of the educated Indian's new identity which have been widely acknowledged by historians. What has been ignored was the sense that the educated citizen had of being morally superior to the uneducated masses. This sense obviously arose out of the identification that the educated felt with the English, but the argument that supported it was different. The moral superiority that the English felt over Indians had two bases—the stereotypes of Indian culture and society, such as the ones projected in James Mill's volumes on Indian history; and the fact of having succeeded in subduing India's native powers. Evangelical as well as utilitarian writings had portrayed Indians as a degraded people, in need of moral reform. But these writings attributed India's depravity to remediable causes; later in the century, the Victorian attitude was quite different. It ascribed India's degradation to racial and climatic and other such incurable sources.²³ Compared to this attitude, the moral superiority of the educated Indian in later nineteenth century and afterwards had more rational props to support it. A prominent philosophical school that provided the rationale for moral superiority was that of evolutionism.

Spencer's theory of evolution served the educated Indians at two levels. At one level, it answered the search for causes of India's defeat. Bharatendu in Hindi and Bankin in Bengali were among the many creative minds who were making this search and giving it expression through their literary writings. Evolutionism gave a purpose to history; it explained in a modern idiom why the English had to come to India and propagate their system of administration, law, and knowledge here. Ranade thought that it was of crucial importance for Indians to study the lessons that the history of India's defeats had to teach. "If those centuries have rolled away to no purpose over our heads" he said, then "our cause is no doubt hopeless beyond care."²⁴ At another level, Spencer's theory provided the hope that a small body of people could influence and reform the much larger society surrounding it. Spencer had argued that "while each individual is developing, the society of which he is an insignificant unit is developing too."²⁵ This organic role of the individual offered a great consolation to the educated Indian who was part of a minuscule minority of the total Indian society. It gave reason to believe that so small a section of society could be an effective agency for influencing the rest. In his presidential address to the students gathered at a conference in Bihar in 1910, Sachchidananda Sinha echoed Spencer's theory when he said: "unity can only be the direct result, not the negation, of a full-developed individualism of each organic part of the whole organism."²⁶ Evolutionism provided the educated Indian with a rationale to perceive himself as a shaping influence on the larger society. We find this rationale in the writings and speeches of eminent Indians

such as Bankim, Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo in Bengal, Ranade and Gokhale in Maharashtra, and Lajpat Rai in Punjab.

One does wonder whether these men reflected a widespread mode of thought, or they expressed a special, individual urge. Public personalities they were no doubt, but we have reason to accept that their sense of having a moral responsibility to transform the traditional social order was typical. It is not just eminent people like them who expressed the feeling of being morally responsible for the upliftment of the masses. Less known people, who were not involved at any point in public action, voiced the same perception. The prize-winning essay in a contest organised by a House of Commons member, after his visit to India, to study the aspirations of educated Indians uses a landscape metaphor to convey the distance between the educated few and the masses:

What the educated classes are thinking today, the masses will be thinking tomorrow. Just as the mountain-tops catch the light of the rising sun first, and then the plains, and lastly the valleys—so the light of knowledge must first shine on those whom Nature has placed in a higher sphere than the rest, and then extend itself to the labourer in the field and the artisan in the workshop.²⁷

ASSOCIATIONS OF EDUCATED INDIANS

It was the self-perception of a colonial elite. Although educated Indians were not the ruling powers of the colonial order, they were a dominant group within the colonised society. They aspired to share power and the privileges of office with the English administrators, although this aspiration was mostly expressed in the vocabulary of request. Two salient characteristics of an elite's self-perception were present in the educated Indian's personality, a sense of moral superiority and the urge to assign to oneself the task of transforming a given social order.²⁸ Group feeling, which need not always graduate into solidarity, originates in the first characteristic; and the driving energy commonly associated with elites originates in the second. It was group-feeling which resulted in the formation of associations of educated Indians in all three presidencies of colonised India during the nineteenth century, specially in the later part of the century when the system of education was well-established. These associations are often described as precursors of modern political consciousness as expressed in the Congress which started in 1885.

Two common features of these associations were, one, the prominence of social reform terminology in the description of their objectives, and two, a ready inclination to associate with or to challenge, other organisations.²⁹ The first tendency gradually evolved into a vision which encouraged the second tendency. The vision represented in many cases a blending of economic interest and concerns with cultural aspirations. Education provided the point and the means of this blending, since it symbolised the possibility of universal upliftment. It pro-

vided the vocabulary in which the aspirations of the colonial citizen could be expressed as an invocation to the masses rather than merely as an appeal to the colonial masters. This aspect of education enabled many nineteenth century associations to spread across geographical and cultural boundaries. Education became the symbol of a new kind of secular ethnicity. It was a 'secular' ethnicity because it was based on western knowledge. The 'truth' of this knowledge was above the kind of controversies in which the 'truth' of several branches of indigenously Indian knowledge were caught. The feeling of being in possession of the same knowledge as the coloniser helped the educated Indian to identify with the coloniser's role in relation to the masses. It is another matter that the secular element in the personality of educated Indians could not protect many of them from the lure of religious revivalism.

URGE TO TRANSFORM SOCIAL ORDER

The urge to transform the social order found expression in different forms, depending on the specific intellectual and cultural exposure that individuals received during their personal development. In some, such as Vivekanand and the later Aurobindo, the urge found a vocabulary of spiritual evolution; in others, like Ranade, Gokhale and Lajpat Rai, it found a vocabulary of political evolution. Religious and social revivalism, as expressed in Tilak's politics was a third expression. These variations were later transmuted into a composite vocabulary of social upliftment, focusing on the upliftment of the downtrodden castes, by Gandhi. In all the variations, we find the recognition of education as an instrument of moral upliftment. Obviously, 'education' did not refer in this usage to the prevailing system of education. Rather, by attacking the prevailing system of education, Indian leaders sought to establish the role of education in idealistic terms. In many cases, most clearly that of Gandhi, education became the practice and the central metaphor of the leader's own life. Gandhi posed his pedagogical role against his political role in a dramatic manner throughout his life. For others, education became a means of helping the masses reclaim their self-identity from colonial masters. Change in self-identity implied a previous step, that of enlightenment and amelioration of character.

If we observe the relationship within which Indian intellectuals and social reformers of later nineteenth century performed their pedagogical role *vis-a-vis* the masses, we will recognise that it was not different from the relationship which the English had established in the early years of the nineteenth century. It was a paternalistic relationship. It was built upon the grand theorisations of the Victorian age concerning the causes of the decline of some nations and the rise of others. The panoramic view of history and society, which shaped several major schools of nineteenth century Euro-

pean social philosophy, had been passed on to the early generations of Indian university graduates through college syllabi and textbooks and the speeches made by professors and administrators. At one level, this view implied an acceptance of racial differences between nations, and at another level it carried a sense of moral obligations on the part of 'superior' nations. This view legitimised imperialism in the name of the destiny of human kind. Indeed, it portrayed imperialism as an agency of change in societies, such as India, which were supposed to be static.³⁰ Within a society, it assigned to the economically and culturally dominant classes the role of a moral teacher *vis-a-vis* the larger population.

The governor of Bombay, Bartle Frere said to Indian graduates in his 1862 convocation address at the University of Bombay: "The character of your whole people is to a great extent in your hands." This attitude of paternalism was imbibed and expressed by Indian social leaders. The manner in which it was expressed varied according to the cultural experience of colonialism in different regions. We find it more copiously expressed by leaders of the Bombay region than by their Bengali counterparts. This difference may be attributed, as Tucker points out, to the fact that the Bombay region did not face the intensity of cultural conflict that Bengal faced in the early period of colonisation. Nevertheless, the idea that the Indians masses suffered from serious weaknesses of character, and that the educated Indians ought to improve the moral fibre of Indian society was as important for Ranade as it was for Vidyasagar and their respective contemporaries in the two regions. This was the central theme of the colonial discourse on education to which both English and Indian intellectuals contributed. The discourse

a morally superior teacher and a society whose character was in need of reform.

SIMILARITY OF INDIAN AND ENGLISH PERCEPTIONS

Before we proceed further in our analysis of this discourse, we ought to recognise that the homonym we have perceived does not fit in with the prevailing conception of later nineteenth century nationalist thought in education. It is commonly believed that Indians like Ranade, Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, and Bankim had a view of education, especially of its social purpose, which significantly differed from the English view. The most articulate expression of this position has been made by Panikkar who says that the educational ideas of Indian intellectuals of the nineteenth century "were different *both in purpose and details* from the policy of the colonial rulers".³¹ He argues that the views held by Indians differed from the English policy on three major counts: first, in the emphasis on science education; secondly, in the realisation of the need for mass education; and thirdly, in support for education in the vernacular. The fact is that colonial officers rarely missed an occasion

to emphasise all three of these points.

Though little was done to introduce science learning in schools, colonial rhetoric from Macaulay onwards was never lacking in the emphasis on the role of science in India's progress. Indeed, the alleged lack of science in Indian tradition, and its strong presence in the European tradition of knowledge served as the hinges allowing a smooth introduction of English language and learning in the curriculum of Indian education. Similarly, the point about the importance of mass education was so dear to the coloniser's heart that we find it elaborated on in just about every major document since Trevelyan's famous book, *Education and the People of India*. The incompatibility of a mass education programme and the internal imperatives of colonial control was beyond the perceptual range of the coloniser. Finally, the question of education in the vernacular was taken up with considerable detail in no less a document than the famous despatch of Charles Wood. This should suffice to show the Indians whom Panikkar cites for advocating science, mass education and the vernacular as a medium were hardly going contrary to the coloniser's discourse on education.

The similarity in the Indian and the English perceptions of education went deeper. We find it reflected not only in the choices advocated as policy steps, but also in the understanding of the implications of these choices. The most striking instance of this can be found in the justification of science. Science was expected not just to improve India materially, but intellectually and morally as well. One of the intellectuals Panikkar quotes, namely Mahenderlal Sarkar, puts this succinctly 'the great defects, inherent and acquired, which were pointed out as the characteristics of the Hindu mind of the present day, could only be remedied by the training which results from the investigation of natural phenomena'. Sarkar was obviously working along the theory which attributed India's defeat at the hands of Europe to moral and intellectual defects of her population. He saw science as a cure for these defects, and in this perception of science just about every English officer in India concerned with education would have been in agreement with him.

NATIONALIST FRAMEWORK

We can now proceed to examine the homonym between the colonial and the nationalist views on the role of education. One source of this homonymy lay in the resonance that the emphasis on moral development in the colonial discourse had in an indigenously Indian discourse on education. In what is usually referred to as the Brahminical tradition, the teacher is regarded as a renouncer of the ordinary course of life, someone in possession of esoteric knowledge. For a pupil to receive knowledge from the teacher demands total commitment to the teacher, along with the sacrifice of his own ordinary urges during

the course of youth. Placing this obviously idealised picture in a historical location is difficult, but there is no doubt about the symbolic potency this idealised picture has enjoyed in social lore. Numerous myths and legends constructed around the theme of the dedicated pupil and the renouncer teacher continue to enjoy great popularity. The modern Hindi litterateur, Mukhtibodh, has captured the essence of the lore most vividly in his short story, 'Brahmrakshas ka Shishya'.³² It narrates the slow process of a young pupil's transformation, and ends by telling us how his teacher attained liberation by transferring his moral and intellectual authority to the pupil.

When Indian leaders and intellectuals started to talk about educational reform during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they did not find it necessary to invent a discourse. The one that the English administrators (including heads of educational institutions) had been using turned out to be quite suitable. It conveyed a familiar-looking truth about education, namely, its value for the development of character. Only the association of this truth with alien masters and alien knowledge had to be purged. The nationalist framework was able to take care of the first kind of association quite well, but the second—i.e., with foreign knowledge—proved harder to purge. Even a militant leader like Tilak in his early phase endorsed English education in preference to traditional Indian education. He saw English education as a means through which modern western knowledge could become available for the reconstruction of a traditional India. It would hardly have been possible for him to have this attitude if he had rejected western knowledge as an 'immoral' force.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF INDIAN LEADERS

The fact that the colonial discourse on education proved so convenient to Indian leaders can also be attributed to the social background of these leaders. The majority of them came from upper caste families, particularly from Brahmin families.³³ This meant that even without the considerable advantages that college education under colonial rule gave them, they were placed far above the labouring masses of rural India. The social distance between them and the masses provided a fertile ground in which a sense of moral superiority, a concomitant of upper-caste status, would rapidly grow with the manure of English education and linkage with colonial administration thrown in. The distance was not a creation of colonial rule. But the economic processes triggered by colonial rule undoubtedly accentuated it, and education gave it a new legitimacy. Opportunities for economic advancement through steady employment or the practice of a profession, such as law, had a glamour quite new in Indian society. Education seemed to offer a direct access to these coveted paths of personal upliftment. It also offered the skills and knowledge that gave the successful native a certain amount

of power. These included the skills of mediating between divergent interests, and the knowledge of administrative rules.³⁴ Armed with these abilities, the educated leaders of Indian opinion enjoyed a high status and the aura of power in the eyes of the uneducated masses. Their status would by itself explain a self-perception of moral superiority and an educative role. The prevalence of an educational discourse that articulated a specifically moral function of education in India complimented this self-perception.

In the writings of Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Lajpat Rai, educational discourse acquired a nationalist slant without losing its homonymic ability to accommodate the two distinct connotations of moral discipline which the imperialist discourse on the one hand, and the traditional Indian discourse on the other, had associated with education. Nor did it lose the stamp of eighteenth century rationality which was devoid of any clues to the problem of human unhappiness in relation to inequality. The faith that a small number of enlightened individuals are all that we need for a change in the social order figured centrally in both associations of meaning. Vivekananda came closest to posing inequality as a moral problem, but he too believed that personal transformation was a means of social reform. A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness and willingness for sacrifice could bring about social regeneration, he thought. Though he acknowledged the problem of Indian masses being "engrossed in the struggle for existence", he emphasised that "spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries for ever".³⁵

GANDHI'S PEDAGOGICAL IDEAS

Gandhi's political philosophy and career present a peculiar contrast in this matter to his pedagogical ideas as expressed in the scheme of *nai talim* or basic education. Gandhi used education as a key metaphor of his political style, and even of his personal life. In this usage, he was undoubtedly following the Brahminical tradition in which the teacher is expected to give up worldly attainments so that he can have unassailable moral authority. He did not, however, follow this line of thought in the programme he proposed specifically for the advancement of education. There he chose a remarkably modernist approach though he dressed it in his well known concern for pragmatic considerations such as budget. The approach was to engage children in manual activity, and to relate school learning to local processes of production. Religious teaching and moral improvement as goals of education were conspicuously absent from Gandhi's articulation of his pedagogical agenda.

Gandhi's programme lived a short life in the Indian education system. Two other modernists, Tfcgor and Gijubhai, had even less of an impact. Indeed, modernist child centred thought always met with hostility or

indifference. Ideas such as the practice of inquiry within one's milieu, and the application of knowledge to solve daily problems were alien to the agenda of moral upliftment which had a central place in both imperialist and nationalist discourses. Since nationalist discourse drew so heavily from the Brahminical tradition, it could not provide room for non-esoteric forms of knowledge that could be pursued, questioned, and added to by ordinary teachers and children. In the colonial view, knowledge and the capacity to inquire were the coloniser's unique privileges; the native was supposed to be ignorant and passive. It was the coloniser's responsibility to kindle in the masses the desire to learn about new ways. It was a fatherly responsibility. Nationalist discourse on education absorbed both the content and the tone of this sense of responsibility. But as Partha Chatterjee³⁶ points out, practitioners of the nationalist discourse, as it matured towards India's independence could afford to be self-consciously paternalistic in the style of English administrators.

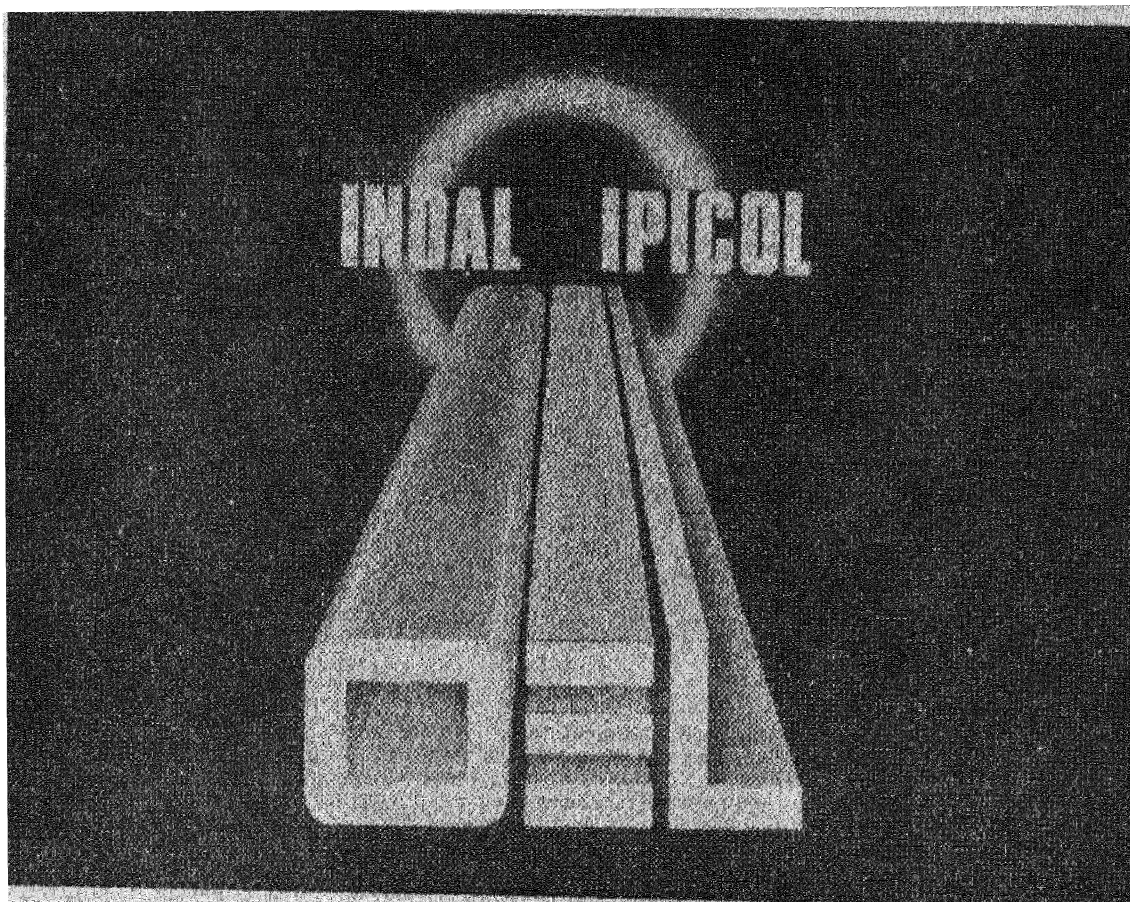
Notes

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